

One of the overlooked aspects of the war we are now fighting is the awakening it has spawned on the left. In one atrocity, Osama bin Laden may have accomplished what a generation of conservative writers have failed to do: convince mainstream liberals of the illogic and nihilism of the powerful postmodern left. For the first time in a very long while, many liberals are reassessing—quietly for the most part—their alliance with the anti-American, anti-capitalist forces they have long appeased, ignored or supported.

COLLECTIVE KNEE

Of course the initial response of left-wing intellectuals to Sept. 11 was one jerking of the collective knee. This was America's fault. From Susan Sontag to Michael Moore, from Noam Chomsky to Edward Said, there was no question that, however awful the attack on the World Trade Center, it was vital to keep attention fixed on the real culprit: the United States. Of the massacre, a Rutgers professor summed up the consensus by informing her students that "We should be aware that, whatever its proximate cause, its ultimate cause is the fascism of U.S. foreign policy over the past many decades." Or as a poster at the demonstration in Washington last weekend put it, "Amerika, Get A Clue."

Less noticed was the reasoned stance of liberal groups like the National Organization for Women. President Kim Candy stated that "The Taliban government of Afghanistan, believed to be harboring suspect Osama bin Laden, subjugates women and girls, and deprives them of the most basic human rights—including education, medicine and jobs. The smoldering remains of the World Trade Center are a stark reminder that when such extremism is allowed to flourish anywhere in the world, none of us is safe." The NAACP issued an equally forceful "message of resolve," declaring, "These tragedies and these acts of evil must not go unpunished. Justice must be served."

Left-wing dissident Christopher Hitchens, meanwhile, assailed his comrades as "soft on crime and soft on fascism." After an initial spasm of equivocation, the American Prospect magazine ran a column this week accusing the pre-emptive peace movement of "a truly vile form of moral equivalency" in equating President Bush with terrorists. Not a hard cell, but daring for a magazine that rarely has even a civil word for the right.

Most moving was Salman Rushdie's early call in the New York Times to "be clear about why this bien-pensant anti-American onslaught is such appalling rubbish. Terrorism is the murder of the innocent; this time, it was mass murder. To excuse such an atrocity by blaming U.S. government policies is to deny the basic idea of all morality: that individuals are responsible for their actions." Whatever else is going on, the liberal-left alliance has taken as big a hit as the conservative-fundamentalist alliance after the blame-America remarks of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson.

It's not hard to see why. Unlike previous Cold War battles, this one is against an enemy with no pretense at any universal, secular ideology that could appeal to Western liberals. However, repulsive, the communist arguments of, say, Ho Chi Minh or Fidel Castro still appealed to a secular, Western ideology. American leftist could delude themselves that they shared the same struggle.

But with Osama bin Laden, and the Islamo-fascism of the Taliban, no such delusions are possible. The American liberal mind has long believed that their prime enemy in America is the religious right, what does that make the Taliban? They sub-

jugate women with a brutality rare even in the Muslim world; they despite Jews; they execute homosexuals by throwing them from very high buildings or crushing them underneath stone walls. There is literally nothing that the left can credibly cling to in rationalizing support for these hate-filled fanatics.

This is therefore an excruciating moment for the postmodern, post-colonial left. They may actually have come across an enemy that even they cannot argue is morally superior to the West. You see this discomfort in the silence of the protestors in Washington, who simply never raised the issue of bin Laden's ideology. You see it is Barbara Ehrenreich's sad plea in the *Village Voice*: "What is so heart-breaking to me as a feminist is that the strongest response to corporate globalization and U.S. military domination is based on such a violent and misogynist ideology."

You see it in the words of Fredric Jameson, a revered postmodernist at Duke University, arguing in the *London Review of Books* that the roots of the conflict are to be found "in the wholesale massacres of the Left systematically encouraged and directed by the Americans in an even earlier period It is, however, only now that the results are working their way out into actuality, for the resultant absence of any Left alternative means that popular revolt and resistance in the Third World have nowhere to go but into religious and 'fundamentalist' forms." The only adequate description of this argument is desperate. And, of course, it ducks the hard question. What does the left do now that these forces are indeed fundamentalist?

The other rhetorical trope that is fast disintegrating is the anti-racist argument. The doctrine of "post-colonialism" which now dominates many American humanities departments invariably sides with Third World regimes against the accumulated evil of the West. So the emergence of the Taliban is a body-blow. If dark-skinned peoples are inherently better than light-skinned peoples, then how does a dark-skinned culture come up with an ideology that is clearly a function of bigotry, misogyny and homophobia?

One immediate response is to argue that the U.S. itself created Osama bin Laden in its war against Soviet communism. This isn't true—but even if it were, doesn't this fact, as Mr. Hitchens has argued, actually increase the West's responsibility to retaliate against him?

WHAT SUPPRESSION?

It may be, in fact, that one of the silver linings of these awful times is that the far left's bluff has been finally called. War focuses issues in ways peace cannot.

Leftists would like to pretend that any criticism of their views raises the spectre of domestic repression. But in a country with a First Amendment, no suppression from government is likely, and in the citadels of the media and the academy, the far left is actually vastly over-represented. The real issue, as pointed out this week by Britain's Labour prime minister, is that some on the left have expressed "a hatred of America that shames those that feel it."

The left's howls of anguish are therefore essentially phony—and they stem from a growing realization that this crisis has largely destroyed the credibility of the far left. Forced to choose between the West and the Taliban, the hard left simply cannot decide. Far from concealing this ideological bankruptcy, we need to expose it and condemn it as widely and as irrevocably as we can. Many liberals are already listening and watching—and the tectonic plates of politics are shifting as they do.

INTRODUCTION OF THE COBRA COVERAGE ACT OF 2001

HON. ADAM B. SCHIFF

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2001

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce the introduction of a piece of legislation that I believe is an essential component of our efforts to help those affected by the attacks of September 11th. My bill, the COBRA Coverage Act of 2001, will provide a 50 percent tax credit toward COBRA coverage for laid-off workers. I believe this is the best way for us to ensure that the thousands of Americans recently laid-off do not go without health insurance.

Under current law, commonly referred to as COBRA, workers who are laid off are allowed to remain in their employer-based health insurance plan for up to 18 months, provided they pay the full premium for the plan (their share plus the employer share) plus a small administrative fee. The problem is, the full premium for employment-based coverage averages almost \$2,500 per year for self-only coverage and about \$6,500 per year for family coverage.

Since COBRA coverage is very expensive, many laid-off workers let their insurance lapse, gambling that they won't get sick or injured before they find another job. We cannot continue to allow so many hard-working Americans and their families to go uninsured. We must find a way to make COBRA coverage more affordable for the thousands of laid-off workers trying to recover from the September 11th attacks.

And my bill does exactly that. The COBRA Coverage Act of 2001 provides continuing health care coverage for laid-off workers at half the price. Under this legislation, laid-off workers would be eligible for a tax credit for 50 percent toward the COBRA coverage premium. The credit would be limited to a maximum of \$110 for an individual and \$290 for a family per month, and would be administered by the employer. This way, workers can receive an immediate benefit and would not have to wait until the end of the year to claim tax credit.

Now, more than ever, we must ensure that American families can afford to remain insured in case of sickness or injury. We must take the lead in ensuring that the thousands of hard-working Americans who have fallen victim to the effects of the September 11th attacks are not set back even further by the lack of health insurance. I urge my colleagues to join me in this effort to make COBRA coverage more affordable for our laid-off workers.

THE FARM SECURITY ACT

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 4, 2001

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, my office has been contacted by dozens of groups expressing concerns about the Farm Security Act (H.R. 2646). I submit the following letter on their behalf.

OCTOBER 2, 2001.

Dear Representative: The one hundred forty-eight (148) groups listed below, from